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**AARP CELEBRATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF GRANDPARENTS DAY WITH
GRANDMOTHERS CAMPAIGN FOR HEALTHY GRANDCHILDREN**

RICHMOND _ As the Grandparents Day national holiday enters its fourth decade on September 13, AARP honors the nation's 70 million grandparents with the debut of the Grandmothers Campaign for Healthy Grandchildren.

By harnessing the power of grandparents, AARP Virginia is launching an effort to make sure children get off to a healthy start. The Grandmothers Campaign is a call to action for all grandmothers to help reduce infant mortality and make sure their grandchildren thrive during the first years of life. AARP developed the project in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Health.

"Grandparents play a vital role in families, and can be an important resource for young parents seeking information about infant health," said Bill Kallio, AARP Virginia State Director. "The person with the strongest emotional influence on the new mother is the child's grandmother."

Thirty years ago when President Jimmy Carter signed the proclamation declaring Grandparents Day a national holiday, he was recognizing "the importance and worth of the 17 million grandparents in our nation." Three decades later, the number of grandparents have more than quadrupled, adding emphasis to Carter's 1979 statement that, "Grandparents are our continuing tie to the near-past, to the events and beliefs and experiences that so strongly affect our lives and the world around us."

Each month about 75,000 Americans age 45-69 become grandparents and 80 million people will have grandchildren by 2010. The average age of becoming a grandparent is 50 years for women. Those women can help enhance their grandchildren's health by being a resource for their daughters during pregnancy and during the first years of their grandchildren's lives.

"Infant mortality is an unseen epidemic," said Dr. Karen Remley, Virginia's health commission. "The Grandmothers Campaign for Healthy Grandchildren underscores the importance grandmothers can play in providing common-sense advice to daughters about prenatal care and caring for a newborn."

The goal of the Grandmothers Campaign is to cut Virginia's infant mortality rate, currently the 30th highest in the nation. Grandmothers and others interested in helping can spread the word through faith organizations, civic organizations and other community groups. Those who join the campaign will:

- receive the latest information about women's health, prenatal care and safe sleep,
- have tools needed to engage young women in important family conversations, and

- be connected to a statewide network of grandmothers who share experiences, learn about infant health and get answers to important health questions.

The Grandmothers Campaign uses the Internet with an online community moderated by the Virginia Department of Health. On the site, grandmothers can post information about their experiences and ask questions. To learn more about the campaign and join the online community, go to www.aarp.org/va. The website includes “conversation starters” – printed documents with information on important health topics that grandmothers can share with their daughters.

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